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The Place of the Person in LIS Research: An Exploration in Methodology and Representation

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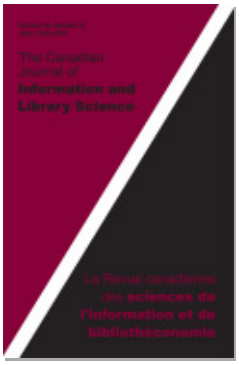

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The Place of the Person in LIS Research: An Exploration in Methodology and Representation

La place de la personne dans la recherche en bibliothéconomie et en sciences de l'information : exploration des méthodologies et des représentations

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Résumé : Dans cette étude exploratoire, le chercheur réfléchit à son expérience personnelle dans une bibliothèque universitaire en tant qu'étudiant pendant une année d'études doctorales. Les données ont été rassemblées en utilisant la méthode autoethnographique, et les réflexions sur les données sont présentées sous la forme de trois clips vidéo de deux minutes chaque, accompagnés de poèmes. Cette étude part de la supposition que les paradigmes et les théories concernant le comportement informationnel affectent la façon dont l'individu est perçu dans le système. Les réflexions soulèvent des questions concernant l'influence qu'ont nos modèles au premier niveau de la profession de bibliothécaire ainsi que du public que les bibliothèques déclarent servir.

Mots-clés : recherche d'information, autoethnographie, poésie

Abstract: In this exploratory study, the researcher reflects on personal experience as a student at an academic library over the course of one year of PhD study. Data were gathered using an autoethnographic methodology, and the reflections on these data are presented in the form of three two-minute video clips narrated with accompanying poems. This study assumes that the different paradigms and theories about information behaviour affect how the individual is understood within this system. These reflections raise questions about the influences our models have at ground level of the library profession and the people libraries claim to serve.

Keywords: information seeking, autoethnography, poetry

Introduction

This study was an exploration in both methodology and representation of results. In this study I collected data about my experiences as a student encountering the library system over a period of one year. Some of my experiences surprised me and I wished to reflect on these and my reactions to them. I asked, "Who am I to this library system?" I also reflected on the literature of library and information science (LIS) that describes the place of the person and I asked how the theories and beliefs about the person are seen in my own experiences in the library. The literature appears to suggest very specific perceptions of the person. This study assumes that the different paradigms and theories about information behaviour affect not only how library services are created but how the individual is understood within this system.

The impetus for this study came from two initial sources. First was Hester and Francis (2003). This study used a self-reflective method of analysis to demonstrate that visually available phenomena are not independent of the observer. The narrative of the trip to the supermarket was then critically analyzed to demonstrate the ways that routine activities had been interpreted on the basis of the situational context of the observer, though other valid interpretations could have been made. I was curious about "a trip to the reference desk" and the ways that the mundane activities there would be interpreted depending on the situational context of the student observer. The second source was Laurel Richardson (2001), offering Louisa May's life story by distilling 36 pages of interview transcriptions into rich poetry. This representation captured the voice and the words of Louisa in a manner that conveyed the emotion of her life. I wondered how poetical reporting might more effectively convey the emotional aspects of seeking reference assistance, a topic frequently discussed in the library literature (Carlile 2007).

Review of the literature

It has widely held that LIS research began a shift in the 1980s very gradually from a system perspective to user perspective (Dervin and Nilan 1986; Hewins 1990; Wilson 1994). Prior to this shift, it has been argued, people were conceived as aspects of the larger information system, and questions of user characteristics, needs, contexts, and perspectives received little attention. Not surprisingly, most research was quantitative. There have been some exceptions overlooked in earlier litera-

ture (Talja and Hartel 2007) of studies that considered ideas of cultural context and affect in information seeking, and, as will be noted below, research in cognate fields. There is now, however, a growing literature that considers information seeking from the perspective of the seeker. Nevertheless, the focus of many recent LIS research studies, although framed as being user-centred, reflect a systems approach (such as in Jansen, Spink, and Saracevic 2000; and Malliari and Kyriaki-Manessi 2007). This first was an analysis of anonymous user query logs from a popular Web search engine. Although some inferences were made about the user, based on the search behaviour (213), the reader does not encounter the "real people" behind the search terms. The study had a system orientation and its conclusions focused on improved interface design. Interestingly Saracevic (1999) has argued for the need to bring together the user-centred and system-centred approaches (1055). The second study examined users' interactions with the online public catalogue using an online questionnaire and transaction logs. The questionnaires recorded type of transactions (simple, advanced), user type (undergraduate, faculty, etc.), department, year of enrolment, and faculty rank (110). The transaction logs recorded all the users' activities from the point they enter the system until they log off (111). The results displayed users' difficulty in interpreting and navigating the system (e.g., they rarely used Boolean operators). The recommendations addressed both interface design and user education. In these types of studies the person is part of the information system and known only through the quantifiable data generated by the system.

There is LIS literature that attempts, from a qualitative perspective, to engage with and understand the person seeking information. How is the person who engages the information system presented? First, it has been noted that there is very little written in LIS about the relationship between the researcher and the researched (McKechnie et al. 2006). There are also only a few articles that consider librarians' perceptions of the people who use library services. Two of the earliest studies were Julien's critical discussion (1999) and Tuominen (1997). Julien argued that by even applying the term *user* to clients of formal information services, by default we exclude others, the non-user of our services, as outside our scope of consideration (206). The term itself carries a pejorative sense as exploiter and in the information systems context as a "user" of computer systems. She further argued that researchers have constructed the "user" as "inadequate half-wits" lacking the skill to effectively access the information systems, and concerned largely with rational

and cognitive processes (207). Conversely, information professionals were constructed as experts upon whom the inferior user is dependent for guidance and access. The user must repeatedly come, like Oliver Twist, bowl with in hand, asking, "Please sir, may I have some more?"

In a 2006 study McKechnie et al. asked how human information behaviour researchers describe participants in reports of empirical research. They wished to understand how the labels these researchers used reflected the relationships created between researchers and the researched. They conducted a content analysis of research reports in the Information Seeking in Context proceedings published from 1996 to 2004 ($N = 96$). They identified four categories of terms used by researchers: quasi socio-demographic, information behaviour, life roles, and research project roles (table 1). Quasi socio-demographic terms were those like *individual*, *female*, *older adults*, and *families*, and these were used in 50% ($n = 48$) of studies. The second set of terms was related to information behaviour such as *end-user*, *inquirer*, and *information seeker*, and these were found in 36.5% ($n = 35$) of studies. Participants were frequently identified in relation to their everyday life roles such as mothers, journalists, students, and administrators. These were used in 83.3% ($n = 80$) of studies. Finally, in 72.9% ($n = 70$) of studies, people were described by their role in the study such as experimental group, informant, subject, and respondent. McKechnie et al. discussed the connotations associated with these terms used particularly with respect to the research roles terms. They concluded, "We often use labels for research participants without attending to the entailments associated with these terms." Further they wrote, "[W]e need to devote more attention to the value of deep reflection about the relationship between researchers and research participants, and about how those relationships become constructed and interpreted through the writing and presentation process" (8). Olsson (2009) has more recently challenged the construction of "users" as "uncertain people who need help" (26) rather than, as Talja (2005, 77) proposed, "knowing subjects, as cultural experts."

There is increasing focus on aspects of situational and life contexts and importantly, Olsson pointed out (2009, 31), some researchers are beginning to understand the importance of affect in the person's information behaviour. As lately as 2005 Julien, McKechnie, and Hart reviewed the studies in LIS and in cognate fields that consider affect in information behaviour but concluded that "affective issues continue to receive minimal attention from authors of systems-related work in LIS" (461). This

situation existed in spite of the fact that information seeking models such as Kuhlthau's (1993, 2004) have long recognized the importance of emotions to the process. Nahl and Bilal (2007) have recently attempted to address this lack with a collection of studies on the theme of emotion and information, and the three most relevant to this study are noted below. Dervin and Reinhard (2007), applying Dervin's sense-making model, which incorporated feelings along with ideas and beliefs as bridging elements in sense making (51–2), examined descriptions of feelings in different information seeking situations. This study included faculty, graduate, and undergraduate participants. Given's study (2007) examined the place of affect in the social construction of both mature and younger undergraduate students' identities on campus and their interpersonal interactions. Given found that the students' emotions were meshed with their information behaviours (167). Additionally, emotions could not be easily categorized as positive or negative because, for example, emotions usually perceived as negative (e.g., disappointment) could be considered positively by the student as motivating toward a positive result (e.g., "rise to the academic or informational challenge") (167–8). Given challenged librarians to consider the affective impacts of the information seeking experiences (173) and adopt more holistic views of users' informational interactions. Mentis's (2007) study noted the research in psychology that considered the impact of feelings of frustration and how it has been applied in LIS research (198–9). Even though her own study focused largely on participants' interactions with technology and levels of frustration, it was instructive to consider how participants perceived and recalled frustrations, and the incidents that caused them. It was interesting to see that it was frequently not the severity of the problem that generated the greatest frustration but the point at which this breakdown occurs (206). Certainly two themes throughout all these studies were that there is a need for more qualitative research into the role emotions play in the information seeking experience, and an awareness by both researchers and librarians that emotions can play a powerful role in the formation of attitudes towards libraries and information seeking in general.

Methodology

Data collection

I chose to adopt an evocative autoethnographic methodology for this study, little used in the LIS research literature, but with a long history

in sociological research. The term *autoethnography* itself has been used in various ways by different authors (Ellis 2004, 41–5). In this study I am using the term in the same way as Carolyn Ellis, who defined *autoethnography* as "writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness" (37). She describes this approach with analogy to the zoom lens, moving from the wide angle of culture to the individual affected. It is usually written in the first person, showcasing concrete action, dialogue and emotion, and relational stories (38). Autoethnography developed out of the need for researchers to "write ethnographies of their 'own people'" (Hayano 1979, 99). It emphasizes intensive participant observation and recognizes that there will be experiences and emotions that insiders share that are not felt by outsiders. Rather than methodological problems, some degree of subjectivism and personal involvement can be seen as assets (101). Hayano's own work, *Poker Faces* (1982), was grounded in his own experiences as a professional poker player in California (Anderson 2006, 376). Autoethnography, though autobiographical, is not autobiography, but in Chang's words (2008, 9) it is "about a research method that utilizes the researchers' autobiographical data to analyze and interpret their cultural assumptions." Chang and Anderson offer excellent histories of this methodology and its uses. There have been attempts to develop a more analytical approach to autoethnography (Anderson 2006), but these have been sharply critiqued (Denzin 2006; Ellis and Bochner 2006) for failing to maintain the personal in the writing. I am distinguishing the approach I am using with the term *evocative* or *emotional autoethnography* because of my concern to capture the emotional content of my experiences and to communicate it to the reader. This approach has been exemplified by Carolyn Ellis, Laurel Richardson, and Carol Rambo Ronai (Anderson 2006, 377). Along with personal recollections, efforts were made to collect self-narratives of key experiences and dialogue with staff members, emails, print documents, and screen captures and video footage.

The poems in their early form were presented in two forums: "Epistemic Bridges: Interdisciplinarity in the Academic" student conference, 12 April 2008, Dalhousie University, Halifax; and Law Faculty Seminar, 19 September 2008, Dalhousie Law School, Dalhousie University. The first audience was doctoral students predominately from health professions while the second was law academics. Both audiences were able to identify with elements of the experiences portrayed in the poems as

library users but interestingly also as people seeking information in other contexts such as health care settings. Some of their feedback is incorporated into my comments below.

As in any ethnographic study, ethical aspects of this study had to be considered. In this study my behaviour as student/library-visitor was not generally under scrutiny except for the emotional responses to my library experiences. The library system is under scrutiny and is sometimes portrayed negatively. I take seriously Ellis's application (2003, 149) of Denzin's (1997) "moral ethic" to seek the public good and do no harm. I provided librarian staff the chance to view my work before publication. This gave me an opportunity for feedback and re-analysis of the fairness of my comments.

Positioning myself as researcher and subject

I am a complete member of the social world under study and I recognize my connection to the research environment and my impact upon it. I am visible and active in the text. I am an academic librarian. I manage the public information services for a specialized academic library. In this capacity, I have played a role in the construction of services based in part on my beliefs about people, information, and human information behaviour. I am also a doctoral student in sociology and LIS. I am now dependent on the services provided by my own library and other libraries across our system. This transition has been illuminating as I have moved between roles in the academic information environment we have constructed. I am sometimes pleased with my experiences interacting with the services I have played a part in building, and sometimes I bristle at how I find myself treated in this same environment. I know how I am perceived. Sometimes I resist those perceptions. I am both the protagonist and antagonist of my poems. This study is what Anderson describes as "opportunistic" autoethnography in that my membership in this group preceded my decision to conduct research (2006, 379). This resulted in challenges to data collection as some "recollections" of encounters as a group member were recorded weeks after they occurred. Chang's warning about excessive reliance on personal memory (2008, 55) is well taken, and efforts were made to support recollections with additional data as noted above. Although the reflections evoke many experiences over a period of a year, certain specific experiences that I felt were exemplary are recounted.

Reflective analysis and representation

I have chosen to present the results of this autoethnographic study through three poems, three video clips, and accompanying narratives in the afterwords. The video footage I collected was used in the production of these video clips, which can be viewed at http://www.iamproject.ca. The edited videos serve two purposes in this study: first, they provide the viewer with a glimpse of the data collected, much in the same way as the dialogue recounted later in this paper as vignettes; and second, I hoped the videos would help the viewer enter into my experience. The creak of the door, the waiting chair, and the moving pen all add to the mood of the piece and hopefully reinforce the poetry by adding a visual layer. In doing so, I hope not to privilege the written over the spoken text (Richardson 1993).

The use of poetical representations in qualitative research has been hotly debated in sociology since the early 1990s. That poetry can powerfully communicate is not disputed. But the resistance to poetic representation in sociology is captured in Richardson's refrain, "But is it sociology?" in "Educational Birds" (1996). It is fair to ask, then, "But is it LIS?" Richardson argues that poetry is a valid form of analysis and presentation. Writing is not, in her words, "a mopping up activity at the end of a research project" but is a method of discovery and analysis (1994b, 516). She has argued that sociological writing, as any other, is constructed and constrained by the conventions and assumptions of the discipline. Poetry then has the potential to expose those ways of writing and their presuppositions (1993, 695). It can allow for "multiple and open readings in ways that conventional sociological writing cannot" (1992, 126). She further argued that poetry more so than prose has the ability to communicate life experience: "[L]yric poems concretize emotions, feelings, and moods—the most private kinds of feelings—so as to re-create the experience itself to another person" (1994a, 9). Perhaps most significantly, Richardson contended that writing sociological poetry was a reflexive experience. One method I did not employ was her use of a "process journal" that described her personal experience of writing (1993, 696).

Perhaps one of the earliest and most vocal opponents of poetic representation in sociology was Michael Schwalbe (1995, 1996). He argued that the aim of ethnography is to "create human experience, echoes of the original, through semiotic artifice" (1995, 395). His most persuasive

arguments are that sociological writing should be accessible by the widest audiences possible; poetry, having a restricted code, conceals rather than makes plain to the reader (397). He rejected the idea that poetry is a more natural form to express life because poetry itself is "highly crafted and controlled though we might not recognize it if we don't know the rules of the craft" (402). Good sociological writing, he argued, should explain the rules of its craft, while poetic writing does not. However, Schwalbe admitted that it is difficult, if not impossible, to articulate all the rules of ethnography or qualitative writing in prose, yet the ethnographer attempts to explain "how we create our stories, here are the rules we follow" (398). He wrote that poetry has a "greater power to conjure images, evoke feelings, and rouse sleepers," but counters that "not all poetry is rousing, let alone engaging; and not all prose is dull" (403). Although Richardson proposed that poetic writing has the potential to make the sociologist more attuned to others, Schwalbe is not convinced that there is anything inherent in poetry that cannot be achieved with better prose writing (404).

ANE poetic traditions

I agree with Schwalbe that there may be nothing superior about poetic writing and that good prose is better than bad poetry. Yet none of his arguments discount that "poetry may actually be a preferable way to tell some kinds of sociological knowing" (Richardson 1993, 704). Schwalbe is correct that poetics, like prose writing, is a craft to take seriously, and this has been exemplified by poets such as Richardson in her study of the practice of poetic writing. Here is where I feel deficient, as I am not trained as an English poet. I drew on my graduate training in ancient Near Eastern (ANE) poetry, specifically Hebrew, Ugaritic, and Aramaic poetical texts. My MA thesis (Michels 1995) examined intertextuality within the biblical psalms and Ugaritic (northern Canaanite) religious texts. The biblical psalms are the most familiar form of ANE poetry for most Western readers. What I found surprising in my thesis research is the depth of emotion in these texts—these are personal experiences of faith, opposition, and rapture—and the depth of theological/philosophical insight that supported them. The words are very intentional and the imagery chosen carefully. Consider the author's poetic self-description of depression from Psalm 102: "For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers. My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food. Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones. I am like a desert owl among the ruins. I lie awake; I have

become like a bird alone on a roof." Many people have found comfort in the words of Psalm 23. "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul." The imagery appears drawn from the daily life experiences of the authors and this gives the poems their evocative power. Beyond this, because much of ANE poetry was influenced by traditions of wisdom writing (Ceresko 1990), it was also intended to be didactic. Wisdom in the ANE context has been defined as "a proverbial sentence or instruction … groping after life's secrets … and a quest for truth concealed in the created order … Propriety, then, is the essential ingredient in wisdom—the right time and place for each word and deed" (Crenshaw 1981, 19).

Consider, as illustrative, the biblical proverb 24, verses 30–4:

> I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment;
>
> thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins.
>
> I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw:
>
> A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—
>
> and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

This is good qualitative method: observation, analysis, synthesis, and a pithy summation. If only all methodological writing were as memorable! In deference to Schwalbe's concern that restricted codes are revealed, there follows a brief discussion of poetic devices used in the construction of my poetry.

Unrestricted codes

Classical Hebrew poetry uses a number of literary tools to create meaning. Poetry in any literary tradition defies definition, yet most can distinguish it from prose. There is specific terminology that I will use in my descriptions adapted from Watson (1986, 12–14). A *colon* is a single line of poetry either as an independent unit or as part of a larger strophe. A *monocolon* is a single line that stands independently. A *bicolon* is a couplet or line pair of two lines or colas. A *tricolon* is a grouping of three

lines that form a single strophe. A *strophe* is a single verse unit. A *stanza* is a subsection of a poem. A *poem* is an independent unit of poetry. I have composed three poems. Each poem has four stanzas and seventeen strophes as identified by indentations in the written text. The stanzas in each are constructed by using strophes of bicola and tricola and each poem ends with a monocolon, which is a Hebrew poetical device for heightened emphasis.

Longman (1987), in considering the characteristics of Hebrew (and more broadly ancient Near Eastern poetical forms), identified four dominant features: *terseness*, *parallelism*, *imagery*, and *metre* (121–34). *Terseness* is seen in the shortness of the lines, arranged in cola rather than paragraphs with frequent use of *ellipsis*, the dropping of the noun or more commonly the verb in parallel lines. The biblical Psalm 33:12 illustrates these characteristics: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, / the people he chose for his inheritance."

Parallelism is usually identified as the leading feature in classical Hebrew poetry. This form builds upon the preceding line, sometimes extending the idea and sometimes diminishing it, within stanzas and sets of cola. Parallelism can be semantic. This is the use of equivalent ideas or synonyms in parallel lines: "Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing." This is what Kugel described as fixed word pairs (1981, 28), as illustrated from an Ugaritic text CTA 3 IV 48: "What enemy rises against Baal / Foe against the Cloud-rider." Parallelism can also be grammatical, paralleling or contrasting the syntax between colas (e.g., line 1: subject + verb + prepositional phrase; line 2: subject + verb + prepositional phrase). Another Hebrew Bible bicolon, Deuteronomy 32:2, illustrates this: "[L]et my teaching fall like rain, and my words descend like dew" (Longman 1987, 129). I have used parallelism as a dominant feature in my poems.

The remaining features are less distinctive. *Imagery* includes the use of personification, allegory, symbol, and metaphor. The final feature is *metre*, which is perhaps less prominent than in Greek, Roman, or English poetry (Longman 1987, 132) but is nevertheless important because "it triggers a reading strategy [;] meter gives language an artificial air that signals to the reader that the text is poetry" (133).

Another important structural element that Watson identifies (1986, 51–2) is *chiasmus*, related to the strophe level element parallelism. Chiastic

patterns arrange strophes or stanzas in ways that repeat key ideas and frame central messages (e.g., A B C D C' B' A'). A Hebrew text example would be from 1 Samuel 3:17:

A What was it that he said to you?
  B Now don't conceal it from me.
    C This will befall you
      D (from) God
      C' and this besides
    B' if you conceal from me
A' any of the words he spoke to you. (51)

The reader's attention can be drawn both to the presence of these structures or anomalies in expected patterns. I have used a chiastic (A B B' A') pattern with the first and fourth stanzas, and the second and third having repeating characteristics elements. The reader will also see the use of terseness and parallelism in the construction of my poems.

Findings

Richardson recounts the reaction from reviewers when she first submitted "Nine Poems" for publication to the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (1994a, 8). Her response was to hear the concerns of the reviewers and include after the poems "afterwords." She described the afterwords as "primarily focused on narrative and validity, as suggestive, not definitive, closed, or authoritative." Likewise, I was reluctant to write about the poems, but I too have heard the concerns of my reviewers and will follow Richardson's example with the inclusion of "afterwords." I believe the poems can stand independently.

I am 1

I am a student
  A researching scholar
I came to your library
  Your collection of knowledge
I did not know
  I did not intend but . . .

I became a demographic
A category in your statistics
A tick on your worksheet.

I asked a question
A puzzlement about my homework
A problem posed by my professor
My question became a search string
A mix of something Boolean
A thing I did not recognize
I searched three webpages
And a database
And an e-journal
You knew that though
Your server told you
Your proxy thing remembered me.

I asked a question
A puzzlement about my homework
A problem posed by my professor
I got an answer
A beginning of a response
A clutch of paper in which it hides
You got many answers
Statistics of my visit
Log files of the things I touched
I know I'm in there
In your research
In the study of today's questions
I know I'm in there with the others
The student before me
The student after me.

I came to your library
Your collection of knowledge
I did not know
I did not intend but . . .
I became a demographic
A category in your statistics
A tick on your worksheet.
I am a student.

I am 2

I am a student
A researching scholar
I came to your library
Your collection of knowledge
I did not know
I did not intend but . . .
I became a user
A taker of your information
An exploiter of your services.
I asked a question
A puzzlement about my homework
A problem posed by my professor
My question showed my ignorance
My lack of skills
My info illiteracy
My poorly constructed question
My fumbling to make sense of my world
My nervousness at asking
You knew that though
You expected me not to know
You counted on my bewilderment.

I asked a question
A puzzlement about my homework
A problem posed by my professor
I got an answer
A direction from the expert
A handout to the mysteries
You got many confirmations
Anecdotes of my incompetence
Stories of my befuddlement
I know I'm in there
In your research
In your case study of first years
I know I'm in there with the others
The Gen-Xers
The Echoes.

I came to your library
Your collection of knowledge

I did not know
I did not intend but . . .
I became a user
A taker of your information
An exploiter of your services.
I am a student.

I am 3

I am a student
A researching scholar
I came to your library
Your collection of knowledge
I did not know
I did not intend but . . .
I became the other
A subject outsider
A dislocated voice.

I asked a question
A puzzlement about my homework
A problem posed by my professor
My question did not belong there
Meant for another desk
Fitting another library
Built of the correct words
Dictionary meanings
Without authority
You knew that though
You saw through my ruse
Playing at belonging

I asked a question
A puzzlement about my homework
A problem posed by my professor
I got an answer
Something to satisfice
Enough to make me go
You got your desk back
Your information space
A place of specific knowledge
I know I'm in there

In your research essay
The paper on interdisciplinarity
I know I'm there in a footnote
The subject outsider
The misplaced seeker.

I came to your library
Your collection of knowledge
I did not know
I did not intend but . . .
I became the other
A subject outsider
A dislocated voice.
I am a student.

Afterwords

These afterwords comment on the contexts behind the poems. I also share several key encounters with the library system that informed my thinking and prompted the questions I asked. Each poem begins and ends from my perspective and self-perception. The first bicolon is my self-designation: "I am a student, a researching scholar." It also announces my relationship to the library system I encounter: it is a place of knowledge but it is viewed as your place, not mine, reflecting your structures and conforming to your rules. My engagement is temporary and I will soon retreat. The conflict arises in each poem as the system attempts, in contrast to my own self-perception, to define who I am and how I am to interact with it. The occasioning incident is an academic assignment. I could not help but underscore the imposed nature of the question—it belongs to my professor—and I may feel no ownership of it. Each poem ends with only a partial resolution to the problem but in a last monocolon, set apart quite intentionally, there is a reaffirmation of my original self-perception. I reject the designations of the system. "I am a student."

I am 1

I am framed through my interactions with the library information systems in the first poem. I drew on works such as Malliari and Kyriaki-Manessi (2007) and Jansen, Spink, and Saracevic (2000), focusing on the single idea of user classification. My research problem, through the

intermediacy of the information professional, is transformed into Boolean logic as a search query for the system. I am reduced to the appropriate categories for statistical recording to be matched later with database data collected on search strings and data sets accessed. The overriding perspective is that if the question is posed properly, then the system will return appropriate responses. Challenges faced from this perspective are the creation of more nuanced and intuitive interfaces that can more effectively translate the user requests into an effective search string, and the education of the user to appropriately interact with the system. In the poem there is an immediate assessment of success: the student has citations to articles and books deemed most relevant by the system. On closer examination, however, it becomes apparent that from the student's perspective what the system has delivered is not an answer to the problem but data from which the student perhaps can formulate an answer. This raises the question of the difference between data and information.

Vignette #1

I wonder what my clients would think if they knew that they were being reduced to categories on a statistics sheet. My reference worksheet has places for their patron status, contact information, the time and length of the transaction, type of transaction, referral information, and then a box for details. We use the data collected for planning services and developing collections and instructional aides. After my second presentation of the poems, a faculty member came to see me. "You really do keep a record of my questions?" She was surprised and seemed a little concerned. "It makes sense that you would do that . . . but . . ." Was it to her some invasion of privacy? Did it detract from her uniqueness as a patron? I did not ask those questions. Perhaps I should have and maybe I will. I do wonder what my question appears like in the statistics of the librarian I spoke to, when I sat on the other side of the desk.

Vignette #2

I am a complex individual; we all are. I am not easily categorized as a library user unless I am prepared to compromise something. The system is created for the library's purposes, not mine. The following exchange, I think, demonstrates this: "What is your faculty?" "My faculty is the Faculty of Graduate Studies." There is silence and a puzzled look. "I mean, what faculty do you belong to . . . the Library School?" "No, I am an interdisciplinary student. My areas of study are information

science, sociology, and anthropology." Again silence. I know that the interface the clerk is looking at has no option for an interdisciplinary student. I offer, "My supervisor is in sociology, so I suppose my home department is sociology." Finally, there is a look of relief on the clerk's face. I have pigeon-holed myself. "Oh, but I'm also a librarian in the Faculty of Law."

Vignette #3

I swear I never received a notice about the books being due. I should have gotten two. The books were recalled early, but by the time I realized it, they were already overdue. I just happened to check my account to renew another book and found out they were due. I was being billed for replacement. I returned the books and emailed straight away. It was an automated system; I knew that. It wasn't personal, but when I received my email reply it became personal. It was certainly my fault and not the system, I was told. I knew the system had been down for several days as the result of a server crash. There were problems restoring the data. It could have very well been the system. I pressed the issue. In one exchange between a supervisor and clerk, I was inadvertently copied and the reply, I felt, challenged my integrity. Do other students feel this way? I want to pull out my librarian ID and say, "Do you know who I am?" Other students don't have a librarian ID to pull out.

I am 2

The second poem demonstrates the shift from a systems approach to a user approach to information behaviour most frequently associated with the constructivist paradigm. I drew on Julien's (1999) critical discussion of the "user" in LIS research. The poem opens with the student as user perhaps intruding in a system that she or he does not understand, is not expected to understand, and rightly should not be expected to understand. I focused on the affective aspects of the encounter, particularly the embarrassment experienced by being placed in this role. It is this feeling that prompts the reference interview to begin with "I know this is a dumb question but . . . ." I have encountered this in the classroom and reference desk from both perspectives. Studies such as Carlisle (2007) on library anxiety and the conceptual work of Kulhthau (1993, 2004) on uncertainty paint a picture of the cognitive processes impeding effective research, and it becomes easy once again to make assumptions about the student's mental and emotional states without an understanding of his or

her prior learning or life context. The poem resolves with the student once more reduced to a classification, albeit a more complex one than the previous. The classification reflects a more qualitative approach to understanding human information behaviour. The librarian is framed as the expert, but it is not the librarian we encounter but the guides that the "expert" creates to guide the hapless student.

Vignette #1

I spent too many hours in the common room of that old house on University Avenue. Interdisciplinary PhD students would gather and talk theory, trade war stories, and gradually become the indispensable support group. I was a librarian but also a colleague and friend. It meant I was safe to ask the "dumb" library question. Side by side with my fellow students, we searched out health articles, and international development policy papers, and sociology websites. These are smart people, but the information maze is sometimes too much. Why are the subject librarians not their best friends? Do these students even know who they are?

Vignette #2

The library had just shifted a large portion of the collection, moved completely to a different floor. The staff made maps and signs and were ready for the questions. But old habits die hard, and some days when you have a deadline, even good maps get turned around. I went to the reference desk and asked where do I find "*Z*"? They gave me a map and sent me off. I couldn't find the journal I wanted. I wasn't where I expected to find it. Back I went to the reference desk. They looked at me oddly and sent me back. It is clearly marked for all to see. I am feeling silly, I've spent how much of my life in libraries, and I can't find the "*Z*" section. I did eventually find it at the other end of the room, not where I would have put it. Is it because I was a librarian that I have conceptions of where it should be? Or would any student have been equally lost? I felt a little vindication to meet a faculty member wandering the stacks, steam issuing from his ears, and map in hand: "Do you know where they put the chemistry journals?"

I am 3

The third poem explores the idea of socially constructed identity. I considered how specific knowledge communities use language to communi-

cate knowledge within the group. In academia, disciplines produce their own ways of describing reality using shared language and experiences. For the student to navigate the specialized academic library, he or she must access both the language of the subject discipline and the language of the library. One's inability to communicate in the language of the community betrays one's status as outsider. By *language* I include patterns of speech and ways of discoursing that are unique to the community. How a library visitor asks a question will tell me a lot about his or her community.

Vignette #1

I chose to test this theory with two of my colleagues. I asked, "If a person at the reference desk asked for a book on torts, to which faculty do they belong? Both replied without hesitation, "A business student." Law students would ask for "Fridman," since it is the citation of a recognized authority that they seek. A business student has learned the concepts and terms but not how the community recognizes authority. It is the language of authority.

Vignette #2

He was obviously kidding when he called me a snail. The law student who called me that knew me from classes I had taught in the law school but also knew I was a doctoral student in another faculty. It is a law school shorthand for "student not actually in law school." It is not meant as a compliment but clearly indicates that I do not belong there. I am an outsider. Snails take space and resources from law students. I have a library elsewhere that I should use. Library staff members have also used that term. I heard it many times over the course of the year. I don't make anything out of it, but it does make me pause. There are also library-sponsored reinforcements of those attitudes. The sign is very explicit: "Law students only." I made that sign. It was a necessity in order to ensure a limited resource—discussion room space—was available to our primary user group. I, as librarian, made the sign that now made me as a non-law doctoral student ineligible to use that room.

Conclusion

The first goal of this study was to explore the efficacy of an autoethnographic methodology in considering student information experiences.

Through analysis of the data collected I was able to examine my interactions with the library system from the perspective of both a student and a librarian. This methodology recognizes that I am affectively engaged in what I am studying as a researcher, as well as a subject. I do not easily reflect on my emotional states nor do I readily commit them to paper. Through this methodology I was challenged "to go there." The second goal was to explore different forms of representation of the findings. The use of poetry and video allowed me to express emotional content in a manner difficult with prose narrative. By sharing my findings through these formats I was required to be pithy and succinct. The length of the narrated poems and videos was approximately two minutes each. This format resonated with my audiences who, though academics, largely were not information scientists. They were able to relate to the feelings conveyed and connect them to diverse information seeking experiences. This effectively "unmasked" the implicit conceptions of the information seeker and makes information professionals more accountable to those they seek to serve.

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